DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 223 925 CG 016 327

AUTHOR	Dunford, Franklyn W.; And Others
TITLE	National Evaluation of Diversion Projects. Executive Summary.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Dept. of Justice/LEAA), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Aug 82
GRANT	77-NI-99-0011; 77-WN-99-0009; 78-JN-AX-0037
NOTE	22p.; Prepared by Behavior Research Institute.
AVAILABLE FROM	NCJRS, Department F, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adolescents; Cost Effectiveness; Delinquency Prevention; *Delinquent Rehabilitation; *Delivery Systems; Evaluation Methods; Formative Evaluation; Intervention; Program Descriptions; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Research Methodology; Secondary Education; Youth Problems
IDENTIFIERS	*Diversion (Judicial); *Juvenile Justice System

ABSTRACT

In 1976 the Special Emphasis branch of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention made $10 million available for the development of 11 diversion programs. A national evaluation of these programs was promoted in the hope of better understanding the viability of diversion as an alternative to traditional practices. The impact of diversion services on youth in four programs was assessed, and there was evidence that the programs did reduce the penetration of youth through the justice system. Programs were less coercive, less controlling and more oriented to meeting clients' needs than justice agencies. Programs as implemented were a good match to original guidelines. However, diversion disposition was no more successful at avoiding stigma, improving social adjustment, or reducing delinquent behavior than justice processing or release. (JAC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

ED223925

National Evaluation of Diversion Projects

Executive Summary

Franklyn W. Dunford
D. Wayne Osgood
Hart F. Weichselbaum

August 1982

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

CG 016327

For the full text of this report

This volume is a summary of the detailed final report of this project. The full text of the final report is available, at cost, in microfiche. Two similar final reports, for which paper copy is available only in summary form, may also be ordered from:

NCJRS Dept. F.
Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20850

Titles available are:

National Evaluation of Diversion Projects NCJ 80830

Assessing the Relationship of Adult Criminal Careers to Juvenile Careers NCJ 77744

National Evaluation of Deinstitutionalization of Status Offender Programs NCJ 80811

Cost is $18 for a single report. You may order any two of the reports for $33.50 or all three for $46.00. Payment in advance is required (by check, money order, VISA or MasterCard, or government purchase order). Make checks payable to NCJRS.

Checks from users in the United States, Canada, or Mexico should be in U.S. dollars. Users elsewhere are encouraged to use American Express Company money orders or to have their banks write drafts on U.S. banks. We are unable to accept U.S. dollar checks drawn on banks outside the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Orders should specify title and NCJ number.

Prepared under Grants No. 77-NI-99-0011, 77-WN-99-0009, and 78-JN-AX-0037 to the Behavioral Research Institute from the National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U. S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U. S. Department of Justice.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Scope of the National Evaluation 2

The Diversion Projects 3

The Impact of Diversion Disposition on Youth 4

The Impact of Diversion Services on Youth 10

Client Characteristics and Service Delivery 13

Client and Service Provider Views of Services 14

System Flow 15

The Cost of Diversion 15

Conclusion 16

INTRODUCTION

Out of the frustrations of the 60's the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration's National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals (1973) recommended that agents of the juvenile justice system and community seek alternative ways of treating troubled youths outside of traditional juvenile justice agencies. This recommendation was based on the assumptions that (1) the labeling perspective applies to youths coming into contact with agencies of the juvenile justice system, but not necessarily to those receiving services from community-based agencies, and (2) that troubled youth need to be "treated." In this manner the weight of the Federal Government was placed behind the development of "diversion" programs for the purpose of creating alternative treatment agencies to those of the justice system.

In 1976 the Special Emphasis branch of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) made $10 million available for the development of 11 diversion programs. The National Institute for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NIJJDP) joined with Special Emphasis to promote a national evaluation of these programs in the hope of better understanding the viability of diversion as an alternative to traditional justice practices. The following represents a brief review of the findings associated with that evaluation as reported in the 800-page final report entitled National Evaluation of Diversion Projects. The reader is encouraged to consult the full report.*

The OJJDP Diversion Initiative was designed to avoid many of the shortcomings characteristics of many of the early diversion programs. Program guidelines limited the target population to youths arrested for delinquent acts who were at risk of further processing through the justice system. Programs were not to serve youths referred from outside the justice system, status offenders, or arrested youths who would normally be lectured and released. Programs were to be clearly distinct from justice agencies in that police and probation officers were not to act as service providers. Furthermore, all programs received ample financial support and had access to outside technical assistance. Though not all of the programs adhered perfectly to all of the guidelines, the Diversion Initiative did result in a set of programs seriously dedicated to serving youth diverted from the justice system.

The approach that OJJDP took in sponsoring the National Evaluation fostered the development of a credible assessment of diversion programming. Not only were the programs being evaluated particularly appropriate, but OJJDP created the conditions necessary for thorough and technically sound research.

The mission given to the Behavioral Research Institute (BRI) was to evaluate the merit of the concept of diversion rather than assist in short-range decisions about program operations, management problems, funding issues, etc. Thus, the researchers were able

---

*Published in microfiche as NCJ 80830 by the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

to concentrate their efforts on issues of the broadest interest and relevance. The evaluation also received the financial support needed for quality research. Finally, a meaningful assessment of the impact of diversion programs on their clients was possible because OJJDP required that some of the programs randomly assign youth to treatment and control groups.

SCOPE OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION

There were four components of the National Evaluation of Diversion Projects: an analysis of the impact of diversion on youth, an analysis of the impact of diversion on the juvenile justice system, a cost analysis, and a process analysis.

Analysis of impact on youth--The purpose of this analysis was to determine if diverting juvenile offenders to community-based youth service agencies resulted in less negative labeling, better social adjustment, and less involvement in delinquency. The evaluation team devoted the bulk of its efforts to this analysis. Special features of the impact study were: (a) random assignment of youth to treatment and control groups, (b) the use of two control groups to separate the effects of diversion services from the effects of being removed from the justice system, and (c) the inclusion of a broad range of outcome measures. The data used in this analysis came from personal interviews with youth, program records of services, and justice system records of arrests. Impact was assessed in terms of alternative justice dispositions as well as variations in service experiences.

Analysis of impact on the justice system--Diversion programs are intended to reduce the flow of youth through the juvenile justice system. This will only occur if a large proportion of a program's clients would have been processed beyond the point of diversion in the absence of the program. Diversion programs have been widely criticized for, instead, "widening the net" of the justice system by serving clients who would otherwise have been released (or who have never been arrested). The National Evaluation addressed this issue by comparing justice system processing rates during program operation to rates for pervious years.

Cost Analysis--Diversion projects have also been promoted as a means of reducing the cost of society's response to delinquent youth. Cost savings would result to the degree that (a) diversion actually replaces further processing through the justice system (incurring such costs as court hearings and probation supervision) and (b) diversion services are less expensive than the services they replace. The analysis consisted of a simple comparison of the costs of diversion services versus those of cases handled in the justice system.

Process analysis--The purpose of the process analysis was to describe the projects and their contexts. Findings concerning the impact of a project can only be interpreted if one has a clear understanding of the project's administration and staffing, the nature and amount of services delivered, the client population served, and the operation of the local justice system. The process analysis relied on many different sources of data, including in-depth interviews with diversion administrators and service providers and justice agencies, questionnaires for service providers concerning their approach to youth services, interviews with clients concerning the services they received, and project records of client characteristics and services delivered. Among the products of the process analysis is (a) a description of each project and its context; (b) an examination of the characteristics of clients, the services delivered, and

the relation between the two; and (c) a comparison of approaches to service delivery at diversion and justice agencies, as revealed by the views of service providers and clients.

THE DIVERSION PROJECTS

The Diversion Initiative supported 11 programs located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. While all 11 programs participated in the National Evaluation, only 4 were selected for the analysis of impact on youth. Brief descriptions of those four project follow. They are referred to as the Midwest, Upper South, Lower South, and East projects. The primary reason for selecting these sites for evaluation was that each of these diversion programs was able to obtain formal agreements with local justice agencies to assign eligible youths randomly to treatment and control groups, to adhere to the definition of diversion adopted by NIJJDP and the evaluation team, and to insure an adequate flow of cases into the sample for research purposes.

Midwest—A department within city government operated this diversion project in cooperation with the city police department. The project included two separate service programs. The first was administered by the city and employed a case advocacy model. The police department administered the second service program. Professional social workers hired by the police department provided crisis intervention that was limited to 1 month.

For both programs, the point of diversion was the juvenile division of the city police department. Although juvenile division detectives decided which cases would be placed in the pool for assignment, the eligibility criteria were strict and explicit. Furthermore, all arrest records were reviewed daily and detectives answered to their superiors when they failed to refer eligible cases. Youths placed in the assignment pool typically had been arrested for several misdemeanors or at least one felony.

Upper South--A private nonprofit organization housed this diversion project. The project functioned as a brokering agency, receiving referrals from juvenile court intake, interviewing youths to determine service placements, and then monitoring service delivery by a variety of community agencies. The most prevalent service was counseling, either individual or family. The next most frequent was recreation, and some clients received employment or educational assistance. Most youths placed in the assignment pool had been arrested for a single felony theft or miltiple misdemeanors.

Lower South--This diversion project was also operated by a private nonprofit organization, and it brokered services through community agencies. Unlike the other diversion projects, each client contracted for a specific amount and type of service. The amount of service depended on the service agency chosen, not on any characteristics of the client. For example, youths went to the Boys Club for 30 visits, attended family therapy for 5 sessions, or gave 40 hours to volunteer service. The project placed less emphasis on counseling than the other projects and more emphasis on recreation-oriented service.

The head of the attorney's office with jurisdiction was totally responsible for determining which cases would be placed in the pool for random assignment. The pool was limited to first-time misdemeanants, though minor felony cases were occasionally included. It should be noted that most first-time misdemeanants were taken to court in this county.

East--The local transit police and a college directed the fourth program. The project employed counselors who managed cases and arranged for referrals to community agencies. Unlike the Upper and Lower South projects, this project did not reimburse community agencies for services rendered. This project also differed from the others in its policy of allowing case managers to decide whether clients assigned to diversion were in need of services. Diversion cases were frequently terminated without services when they were deemed unnecessary.

Individual arresting officers decided, on the basis of departmental orders, if cases would be placed in the assignment pool. Virtually all of the youth chosen had been arrested for misdemeanors, usually minor thefts, vandalism, or forms of public disorder occurring in the transit system.

THE IMPACT OF DIVERSION DISPOSITION ON YOUTH

Our review of many of the better evaluations of diversion programming revealed that a number of common flaws tend to obscure and confuse our thinking about the effectiveness of this process. First, comparisons between groups of youths diverted for services and those handled in traditional modes are too often confounded by initial differences between experimental and control groups. This problem is probably responsible for more confusion than any other single evaluation weakness found in the diversion literature. Second, outcome or success variables tend to be limited to official measures of delinquency, i.e., official reactions to observed behavior. Assessments of self-reported delinquency, negative labeling, alienation, isolation, peer measures, and many other variables theoretically and empirically linked to delinquency are bypassed as possible success criteria. In the process, attention is focused on outcomes (official recidivism) that would not be expected to be immediately affected by diversion services, while those that would (self-reported delinquency, negative labeling etc.) are ignored.

A third flaw is confusion about appropriate control groups. Some studies compare one type of diversion client to another, or diversion clients to justice clients, and others compare them to offenders who are released without services. Information from such analyses is too often incomplete and thus uninterpretable. Fourth, program interventions are seldom systematically recorded, so that outcomes cannot be traced to treatment strategies. The types, amounts, and duration of services are typically not documented and thus success or failure is unexplainable. In sum, inappropriately narrow measures are selected to assess outcomes, comparison groups are missing or biased at the outset, and faulty methodology confounds resulting findings. Each of these shortcomings is addressed by the present study.

Random Assignment--Unless treatment and control groups are similar in all possible respects, there is little reason to place confidence in subsequent research findings. Too many evaluations of diversion programs involve youths assigned to diversion who are less serious offenders than are those assigned to formal justice processing. Consequently, diversion clients, by comparison, exhibit less delinquent behavior than do members of the control group. The most effective way of promoting the comparability of groups is to randomly assign cases among them.

We were fortunate to be able to implement random assignment in four different cities for this study. At each site, justice system officials agreed to refer cases for random assignment and to comply with whichever disposition resulted for each case, be it diversion without services, diversion with services, or penetration into the justice

system. When justice officials felt strongly that a youth required project services and were unwilling to allow diversion without services, arrangements were made to refer the youth directly to the project. Such youths never entered the eligible pool and did not become part of the impact analysis.

Research design--The evaluation included one experimental and two control groups--an experimental group to experience diversion from traditional justice processes as well as to receive services associated with diversion programming, one control group to receive normal formal processing from the juvenile justice system, and one control group to be released outright with no services. By comparing the diversion clients with the first control group it was possible to determine the labeling and treatment effects of a diversion disposition relative to those of the juvenile justice system. The no-services control group was necessary to determine if the effects of diversion were the result of services or merely the results of avoiding the stigma of the justice system.

The essential characteristic of diversion programs is their status as an alternative to processing in the justice system, not a particular type of services or client population. Because the four programs varied widely in their client populations and service delivery, the impact analysis cannot be considered an evaluation of a specific model of diversion programs. OJJDP's Diversion Initiative was designed to elicit a broad range of programs, not to implement any particular model. For this reason, data from the four sites were not combined but were treated as four separate studies. Sample sizes at each site were sufficient for adequate statistical power, and the variability among projects was viewed as advantageous for a more general test of the impact of diversion.

The evaluation of the four programs described above represents a fair test of diversion, in our estimate. The programs adopted a much stricter (and more appropriate) definition of diversion than do most programs, and they received much greater financial resources than are typical. If these programs could not achieve their intended results, then diversion is not likely to be a generally successful strategy. These projects, however, are not representative of all diversion programs, and the findings resulting from this study cannot be generalized to other individual diversion programs.

Because we were evaluating progams operating in real-world contexts, youths in each group did not receive uniform treatment. Like most youth-service and justice agencies, those in our study preferred to treat each youth according to his or her individual needs. Thus, diversion and justice clients participated in widely varying amounts and types of services and levels of supervision. Variability within groups also occurred as youths who were rearrested sometimes received dispositions different from those associated with the offense that got them into the study, and youths in any group could (and sometimes did) seek services on their own.

This variability within treatment groups does not diminish the relevance of comparisons among them because it is an unavoidable feature of actual program operation. Youth service programs do not exist in a vacuum. Determining the effects of diversion programs operating in normal settings, although a messy business, provides realistic information.

Nevertheless, it is also desirable to determine the effects of varying amounts and types of services. Therefore, in addition to our analysis of the impact of disposition (based on comparisons among the three treatment groups), we performed an analysis of the impact of services. While the latter analysis did not have the advantage of

random assignment to differing services, it did allow us to gain some information about the impact of variations in services.

Outcome measures--The outcome measures used to evaluate dispositional impact on clients came from personal interviews with youths and justice agency records of arrest. Youths in the eligible pool were interviewed three times over a 1-year period to assess negative labeling, social adjustment, and self-reported delinquency. The first interview took place soon after assignment to a disposition. The second and third interviews were 6 and 12 months later. Paid interviewers conducted the interviews which usually took place in respondents' homes and by a person of the same ethnic background. Field coordinators were employed at each site to supervise interviewers. Informed consent was required from both respondents and parents. Respondents received $5 for each interview.

The 46 labeling and social adjustment scales used in the evaluation consisted of a variety of measures including such dimensions as labeling as bad and sick, alienation, social isolation, self-image, importance of goals, attitudes of success, and peer measures. These and other measures focused upon experiences and attitudes associated with family, school and peer contexts and each scale was a composite of responses to three or more items.

The self-reported delinquency items included measures of all but one of the UCR Part I offenses (homicide is excluded), 60 percent of the Part II offenses, and a wide range of "other" offenses--such as delinquency lifestyle items, misdemeanors, and status offenses. The vast majority of items involved violations of criminal statutes.

Recividism was assessed in terms of the number of official arrests for delinquent acts in the 6- and 12-month periods subsequent to referral to a diversion program (or assignment to a control group). This index included status, misdemeanor, and felony offenses. The two major indexes of prior arrest history were the total number of arrests for delinquent acts at any time prior to the presenting offense and whether the presenting offense was a felony or a misdemeanor. Official recidivism was divided into two measures, simple and multiple. The former represents a dichotomy of repeat and nonrepeat offenders, while the latter is a trichotomy of offenders with participants divided into groups on the basis of the frequency with which they were apprehended for law violations occurring after the offense that introduced youths to the study.

Comparability of groups--Though procedures were adopted to insure reliability in random assignment outcome, it was possible that the resulting groups would not be comparable, either because of failures unknown to the researchers that allowed bias to enter the assignment procedures or because of chance fluctuations in assignment process. All youths initially assigned to each of the three justice dispositions, irrespective of participation status, were compared on age, sex, ethnicity, presenting offense, and prior arrest histories. If the assignment procedures were truly random, youths in the different assignment groups would be expected to be similar on any variable chosen for comparison. The results of these analyses suggested that random assignment procedures produced relatively equal disposition groups at the outset. Differences were found for selected comparisons on three of the four sites, but only one instance was in a direction that would be expected if assignment procedures had been manipulated. In the East project, youths of the penetration group (those assigned to continued progression into the justice system) had a greater proportion of youths with two or more prior offenses than did the no service and diversion groups. We were thus alerted to a possible problem in the East project.

A second point for comparison for assignment bias involved preinterview losses. Inasmuch as consent to participate in the study was obtained after random assignment a large refusal rate would be expected. The concern here was that preinterview losses not be evenly distributed across dispositions, indicative of bias. Subsequent analyses showed no statistically significant difference in loss rates except at the Upper South project where a difference was expected. In this instance a BRI employee failed to contact penetration youths and parents for consent and interviews for a period of approximately 6 weeks. This period of inactivity was temporarily concealed from BRI and resulted in the loss of a disproportionate number of youths from the penetration group. Log linear analyses used to focus upon the three-way interaction of interview status, disposition, and selected demographic variables indicated that the only site in which losses were not evenly distributed by disposition and demographic characteristic was the Upper South. There the preinterview losses were disproportionately representative of more serious and frequent offenders and more often from the penetration group than those assigned to the other dispositions.

Inasmuch as most analyses were limited to youth interviewed all three times, a final set of comparisons at Time One were completed between dispositional groups containing respondents present for all interviews. The point of this analysis was to ascertain if the experimental groups upon which most of the analyses for dispositional effects were conducted were comparable at the first measurement period. Comparison of youth in each of these justice dispositions at the first measurement period on demographic variables, offense histories, school data, employment, self-reported delinquency, and 46 labeling and social adjustment variables revealed no more statistically significant differences between dispositional groupos than would be expected by chance. Furthermore, reviews of all comparisons revealed no constant trends in the differences among dispositional groups at the first interview period with the possible exception that the self-reported delinquency of the penetration group tended to be higher. Although no statistically significant differences between groups were obtained, this was the same pattern as had appeared for prior arrests. With this possible exception, the youths of the three comparison groups appeared to be evenly matched and comparable at the outset of analysis.

Results. The impact assessments for justice disposition included both univariate and multivariate analyses. Comparisons were made in terms of three sets of outcome variables: negative labeling, social adjustment, and juvenile delinquency. Youths diverted for services were expected to experience greater improvement on the dependent variables at subsequent measurement periods vis-a-vis the other two justice dispositions.

A wide variety of statistical techniques are appropriate for a research design using random assignment to treatment groups. In order to increase the likelihood of detecting the programs' effects, we chose three techniques for analyzing the interview data, each most sensitive to a different pattern of effects.

The first technique used to determine if there were changes in the outcome variables that were related to justice dispositions was a two-way analysis for variance (disposition by time period). Here an interaction effect would indicate that one disposition had resulted in more change than another.

A second test for dispositional effects involved an analysis of variance on Time 3 data, including selected respondent characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status) and disposition as independent variables and the interview measures as dependent variables. Since the dispositional groups were comparable at the first measurement period on the dependent measures, any differences among dispositions found at

the third measurement period would be attributable to the experience associated with the different dispositions.

A final univariate test involved an analysis of variance using the same independent variables as those associated with Time 3 comparisons but comparing changes in the dependent variables from the first to the third measurement periods. This analysis focused on raw change scores and determined if change occurred differentially for alternative dispositions controlling for age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

The latter two analyses also permitted tests for interaction between subject characteristics and the effects of treatment. That is, they addressed the questions, "Does the impact of treatment vary with the age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of respondents?" An additional test for differential effects of treatment was also conducted, based on an empirical typology of youth formed using data from the initial interview. This typology, however, did not yield distinct types, and there was no evidence that the programs were more successful for one type than another.

The three univariate analyses were conducted on 19 labeling measures to address the question, "Are youths diverted out of the justice system for services less stigmatized than those who penetrate the justice system or who are released with no services?" A review of the few instances in which significant effects were found revealed no patterns or trends, suggesting that disposition had very little effect upon the labeling experiences of the youths in the three justice dispositions at the four sites.

The same tests on 22 social adjustment measures, developed to determine if youths diverted out of the justice were subsequently better socially adjusted than youths of the other two dispositions, produced almost identical findings. In those few cases where differences were found, the direction of the differences were mixed and infrequently favored the youths diverted for services.

The analyses conducted on the self-reported delinquency data to assess the effects of diversion disposition on later delinquent behavior indicated that youth diverted for services reported no less involvement in subsequent delinquent behavior than did youths lectured and released or those processed for further penetration into the justice system. Furthermore, for all three types of outcome, no interaction effects were found between disposition and age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was also used as a general test for the effects of disposition, controlling for age, sex, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on a composite of impact variables that included labeling, social adjustment, and self-reported delinquency. A MANOVA was selected as a summary analytical technique because it allows for the treatment of more than one dependent variable at a time.

Of the original outcome measures, 19 were selected for the MANOVA. MANOVA's were conducted for these outcome variables measured 6 and 12 months after assignment to disposition. Initial differences between groups on the 19 measures were controlled for, as well as differences in age, sex, and ethnicity.

One of the eight assessments for effects (four sites at 6 months and 12 months) was found to be statistically significant and that was for the Midwest project. In order to determine which variables were contributing the most in differentiating between dispositions for the multivariate tests in the Midwest, the univariate tests accompanying the MANOVA were studied. The adjusted cell means (adjusted for Time 1 data as well as

age, sex, and ethnicity) for those univariate tests which approached statistical significance ($p<.10$) were analyzed to determine if youths diverted for services had more positive outcomes than youths in other dispositions. The results provided no evidence that diversion was a more effective disposition in the Midwest than were either of the other dispositions. Instead, a slight trend toward more positive outcomes for lectured and released youths and towards more negative outcomes for one of the two service programs was noted,[1] but the actual magnitude of differences was small.

Given the large samples used in this study and the power involved in the MANOVA to identify differences among groups even when such diffeences are small, our analyses of the interview data suggest that there is little reason to suppose that alternative justice dispositions had differential impact upon the subsequent behavior of the youths in this study and little evidence upon which to accept diversion for services as being more beneficial than release or penetration into the justice system.

An additional measure of outcome was drawn from official records of rearrest. Two indexes were formed: simple and multiple recidivism, as explained above. Analysis involved three levels of rearrest: felony arrests, felony-misdemeanor arrests, and felony-misdemeanor-status offense arrests.

Comparisons of justice disposition for simple and multiple recidivism outcomes at 6 and 12 months after the date of the presenting offense were completed for all youths initially assigned to the three experimental groups (eliminating the problem of interview losses). The results indicated that there were no differences among dispositions for any recidivism measure in the Midwest or Lower South at either 6 or 12 months after the presenting offense.

In the Upper South an effect was found for felony simple recidivism and misdemeanor-felony multiple recidivism at 6 months, showing the least recidivism among the penetration group and the most among no-service youths. Both effects disappeared by 12 months after arrest. The eastern project was characterized by significantly greater numbers of rearrests among penetration youths for status-misdemeanor-felony offenses for both simple and multiple recidivism at 6 months as well as for misdemeanor-felony simple recidivism at 6 months. Since this pattern matches differences in prior arrests, it might well be expected. In every instance, however, these differences disappear by the 12-month measures. Furthermore, when number of prior offenses was controlled, no significant differences in recidivism among dispositions were found for any time period for any class of offense in the East. The results of the test for effects of dispositions on recidivism using official return rates suggest that justice disposition had little effect in reducing recidivism on the four impact sites in which comparisons were made.

In summary, the univariate tests involving 41 labeling, social adjustment, and self-reported delinquency variables as well as multivariate tests based upon a subset of impact measures indicate that youths diverted for services do not show greater improvement on the impact variables measured at 6 and 12 months after diversion than do

---

[1]The Midwest Diversion Project used two separate service components, each evaluated separately.

youths traditionally processed into the justice system. Comparisons of disposition groups on simple and multiple recidivism at 6 and 12 months after the presenting offense indicate that the recidivism rates for youths diverted for services are not lower than those for youths diverted for no services or for those processed to the next stage in the justice system.

THE IMPACT OF DIVERSION SERVICES ON YOUTH

The analyses for disposition effects considered the question of whether outcomes--changes in social adjustment, labeling, and delinquent behavior--differed for youths asigned to different dispositions: diversion without services, diversion with services, and penetration into the juvenile justice system. The analyses for the effects of services focused upon whether outcomes differed for youths who received services (through either diversion projects or community-based agencies) as compared with those who did not.

Although kindred, the two inquiries are not identical, since assignment to a disposition is only imperfectly related to the "treatment" that a youth ultimately receives. That is, assignment to diversion with services is no guarantee that services will be delivered, assignment to diversion without services does not preclude obtaining services on one's own, etc. By setting dispositional assignment aside, the services analyses more directly address the fundamental question of whether services per se have an impact on client outcomes.

The data collected in the National Evaluation offered two approaches to the problem. First, information about client services was culled from project records for all interviewed youths assigned to diversion with services. This made it possible to compare groups of clients that differed in the amount and kind of project services they received. Second, youths assigned to all three dispositions were asked to describe their service experiences in the second and third wave questionnaires. Similar comparisons were made based on these self-reports.

The basic analyses used to assess the impact of services were comparisons of outcome between a group of respondents that had received services and a group that had not, or between a group that had received a particular kind of service and a group that had not. Unlike the impact of disposition analysis in which the initial comparability of groups was reasonably assured by the random assignment procedure, the present analyses involved groups that were <u>expected</u> to differ initially. For this reason, it is necessary to retreat from the analysis of an experimental design to a post hoc analysis of nonequivalent groups.

All of the analyses followed the same basic pattern regardless of the independent variable in question. First, a three-part analysis was conducted using the variables assessed in the interviews--labeling, social adjustment, and self-reported delinquency--as measures of outcome. The approach was multivariate. That is, several dependent variables and covariates were considered simultaneously, and age, sex, ethnicity, and arrests prior to referral were controlled before comparisons were made. Because we did not expect treatment groups to be initially equivalent, the first part of the analysis compared groups on Time 1 scores for all dependent variables. Knowledge of initial differences was important in interpreting the results of the rest of the analyses. The remaining two analyses were attempts to take initial differences into account in assessing treatment effects. One was a multivariate extension of gain-score analysis in which differences between Time 3 and Time 1 scores were used as the multiple dependent

variables. The other was a multivariate analysis of covariance in which Time 3 scores were compared after the effects of Time 1 scores had been covaried out.

After the impact of services on the interview variables was assessed for a given independent variable, a second analysis was performed using rearrest information. Following the logic just described, treatment groups were compared after covarying out the effects of age, sex, ethnicity, and total arrests prior to referral. The logarithm of number of rearrests for misdemeanors and felonies (plus one) in the year following referral was the dependent variable.

Diversion project records of services--One of the tasks of the National Evaluation was to collect detailed descriptions of services provided to clients from project records. Apart from giving recommendations about what kinds of information might prove useful in an analysis of services, the evaluators had little control over the form or the content of the information that was collected, since case recordkeeping was the responsibility of the project. The result was varying formats and problems of missing data. However, by making a few necessary extrapolations and simplifying assumptions a degree of comparability and completeness was achieved. The first analyses for the impact of services on youths involved servicews delivered to youths as recorded by service providers.

In order to determine whether the amount of diversion services received affected outcomes for project clients, youths were sorted into three groups based on the Total Number of Contacts recorded for them in project records (low contacts = 1-6; medium = 7-14; and high = 15 contacts and up). In this analysis, the medium and high groups were collapsed in the East because of the small number of clients receiving services. (Inappropriate referrals and youths who moved or died in the course of the study were excluded from the analysis.)

Results of the analysis using the interview and arrest data indicated no significant differences in the treatment outcomes of clients receiving varying amounts of project services at any of the four sites. None of the multivariate tests of differences between change scores or between Time 3 scores adjusted for initial group differences were significant at the .05 level. Nor were the univariate tests on recidivism data significant at that level.

A similar analysis was conducted to assess the impact of particular kinds of services on client outcomes. Three independent variables were constructed by dichotomizing Number of Counseling Contacts (none or one vs. more), Number of Job/Education Contacts (none vs. some), and Number of Recreation Contacts (none vs. some). Note that receiving one kind of service did not preclude receiving the others. Analysis revealed significant effects for one type of service--recreational activities--for the Midwest and East projects. The MANOVA comparisons for difference scores (Time 3 minus Time 1) and for Time 3 scores adjusted for initial differences indicated that for the Midwest site, the two groups (those who received recreation services and those who did not) changed differentially over the year in which the study was conducted. Both groups had different Time 3 scores when initial differences were controlled. Youths receiving recreation services changed in the direction of feeling less committed to their parents and more committed to their peers, expressing less disapproval of deviance, experiencing less counterlabeling, and perceiving their parents as more disapproving of deviance relative to youths who did not receive services. Overall, recreational activities seem to have had a deleterious effect on clients. The effect was consistent across variables, but it was not large.

For the East project none of the univariate tests for adjusted mean differences were significant, but the direction of the group differences was the same as in the covariance analysis (adjusted Time 3 means). Again, receiving recreation services sems to have had a negative effect on client outcomes. Those receiving them felt more labeled as "bad" by others, labeled themselves as more "sick," felt more socially isolated, and perceived their peers as more approving of deviance relative to youths who did not receive these services. No differences in recidivism were found at any of the four sites.

Self-Reported Records of Service. Information about services was also solicited from the youths themselves, a far simpler task than surveying project records. All youths who were interviewed at Time 3 were asked a series of questions designed to elicit descriptions of the community-based services they had received in the preceding year. These data extended the analysis of the impact of services to include respondents in the other disposition groups (no services and penetration) for whom, of course, no diversion project service records were available.

In the analysis of the effects of amount of services, youths were divided into three groups based on Total Number of Contacts: None, Some (1-15 contacts), and Many (16 contacts and up). In order to determine whether the amount of community agency services affected outcomes for the total interviewed sample, a set of analyses identical to those based on project records of services was conducted.

Changes in outcome measures varied with the amount of services received from community-based agencies in the Lower South, but not in any of the other cities. Statistically significant effects were found in the Lower South for both the MANOVA for difference scores and the multivariate analysis of covariance for Time 3 scores. Inspection of univariate tests on selected variables suggested a fairly consistent pattern of results for both analyses. With the exception of Parent's Disapproval of Deviance, groups reporting no service contacts and many service contacts were quite similar. Both groups differed, however, from the group reporting an intermediate amount of services. The extreme groups had better outcomes than the intermediate group in that they perceived their peers as less delinquent and reported engaging in less minor delinquency and drug use. On the other hand, the groups with no contacts or many contacts were more likely to describe themselves as "sick" relative to the intermediate group.

The curvilinear relationship between amount of services and outcomes is consistent with the notion that providing minimal services does more harm than good, that either intensive interventions or none at all should be applied. Furthermore, it is conceivable that some treatment, for example counseling services, might reduce delinquency and at the same time undermine self-concept. At this point, however, this is merely conjecture, given the magnitude of the effects in question and the absence of significant findings for the other sites. Furthermore, no significant effects of services on rearrests were found for any of the four sites.

Based on youths' self-reports, one last set of independent variables reflecting different kinds of services was found by dichotomizing Number of Counseling Contacts (none vs. some), Number of Job or Education Contacts (none vs. some), and Number of Recreation Contacts (none vs. some).

Out of 24 possible multivariate comparisons (two analyses, three kinds of services, four sites), only one was statistically significant at the .05 level: the covariance analysis of Time 3 scores indicated that clients who received counseling services in the Lower South reported less normlessness, attached more importance to conventional

goals, and perceived their parents as less approving of delinquency than their counterparts who did not receive services. At the same time, they reported engaging in more minor delinquency and more alcohol and drug use.

Again, no significant differences in rearrests were found for any of the three kinds of services at any sites.

It is difficult, in summary, to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of services on youth outcomes from these data, but strong and pointed trends occurred that are informative even if not conclusive. First, no significant differences in treatment outcomes for clients receiving varying amounts of project-recorded services were found at any of the four sites for the impact variables, including self-reported delinquency and official recidivism. Nor were any particular kinds of services found to be consistently more beneficial than any other kinds, although there was some indication that recreational services might have had a negative effect upon client outcomes.

Second, no significant differences in outcomes were found among respondents reporting different amounts of services on three of the four sites. On the fourth site there was some evidence, although slight, that the relationship between self-reported services and outcome may have been curvilinear—intermediate amounts of services may be less beneficial than no services or extensive services. Comparisons amoung self-reported types of services revealed no particular service type as more beneficial than any other type. Additionally, no differences in rearrest rates were found among groups differing in amounts or kinds of self-reported services.

These data indicate that for the four sites at which random assignment was achieved and records of services were acquired, justice disposition, frequency of services, and service type were of little consequence in affecting labeling, social adjustment, self-reported delinquency, and official recidivism as measured in this research.

CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

After the analyses for the effects of the impact of diversion disposition and diversion, the evaluation focus broadened to describe all 11 projects in terms of the clients they served and the services they provided. Data were collected for two samples of youths referred to the diversion projects. The first and larger sample consisted of a complete census of all youths referred to the projects in their first 2 years of operation. Project records were searched for client information including dates of arrest, referral, services, and termination; type of offense; and reason for termination. A smaller sample was selected of up to 350 cases per site for the first 18 months of project operations. A more comprehensive search of project records was conducted for these youths for the purpose of acquiring more detailed information about diversion services. Official recidivism data were also obtained for the youths of the smaller sample.

The review of these samples across 12 to 18 months of project operations indicted that the majority of client referrals were males with considerble age and ethnic diversity. Almost all of the possible referral sources in the justice system were represented among the sites of the study, as were the types of offenses for which youths could be referred. The projects accepted very few cases referred from outside the justice system; in fact, most projects accepted none whatsoever. Though not all youths referred for services received them, enrollment rates tended to be high, ranging from a low of

76 percent to a high of 98 percent. Interestingly, not all youths enrolled for services received services following the intake and enrollment process. Retention rates ranged from 58 percent to 96 percent of total referrals. The number of service contacts for youths receiving services beyond intake varied from a median of 6 to 37 (mean number of contacts ranged from 10 to 53). The average length of the period in which youths actually received services fluctuated from 3 months to 9 months, with youths in all but two projects averaging slightly less than 5 months of services.

Analyses designed to assess the distribution of types of services by age, sex, ethnicity, number of prior offenses, and seriousness of presenting offense revealed few differences across sites, although there was a tendency for nonwhites and younger clients to be retained for services more often than whites and older clients. The one exception involved job/education services, where older clients were more likely to be selected. Asessments for the effects of services on recidivism rates at all sites suggested that, by and large, recidivism was not impacted by the number of contacts or the kinds of services youths received.

CLIENT AND SERVICE PROVIDER VIEWS OF SERVICES

The argument that diversion programming reduces delinquency among juvenile offenders rests on the assumption that there are important differences between the services provided by diversion programs and the services associated with more traditional dispositions such as probation or incarceration. These differences would not necessarily be found in the content of the services, such as whether youths are counseled, participate in recreational activities, or receive school or job asistance, but rather in the attitudes and practices of those providing services. Diversion service providers should be less coercive, less concerned with social control, and more oriented toward serving clients' needs than service providers at justice agencies. They should also hold less stigmatized views of their clients. For the logic of diversion to hold, the clients' views about the two types of programs should also differ in the same ways. The programs must provide different experiences to clients if they are to have different effects on behavior.

Given these rather basic assumptions, practitioners from the juvenile justice and community youth services systems for nine of the evaluation sites were assessed to determine their opinions about the youths and services with which they were associated. The results indicated perfect consistency across sites and were supportive of the diversion rationale. Vis-a-vis justice personnel, diversion program personnel held less coercive and controlling opinions about their clients and services, were more needs-oriented, and were less prone to hold negative attitudes concerning the emotional and delinquent status of their clients. Comparisons of the attitudes of youths receiving justice and diversion services on these dimensions revealed similar trends favoring diversion services, although statistically significant differences were obtained on only one site.

Comparisons of service provider and client opinions concerning the extent to which programming was perceived as stigmatic, coercive, etc., again produced consistent findings across sites. Clients expressed less favorable views, compared with program personnel, relative to the attributes of their programs. That is, clients consistently described programs as being more coercive, more controlling, and less fulfilling in meeting their needs than did the service providers. Interestingly, client reports about service providers' views of clients were substantially more positive than were the sentiments expressed by the service providers themselves, suggesting that service providers communicate more client support than they may actually feel.

Overall, corroboration was acquired for the assumptions supportive of diversion; i.e., that community-based youth service providers are less controlling and less coercive in their orientation to youths than are agents of the juvenile justice system. Differences in service providers' views about clients were less compelling, although the trend was in the hypothesized direction.

SYSTEM FLOW

One method to assess the impact of diversion programs is to evaluate the extent to which the juvenile justice system has been impacted. By calculating the proportion of juveniles progressing to various stages within a system both before and after a diversion project began, it can be determined in part whether or not the diversion project was successful in channeling youths out of the system. A flow analysis is thus one of several ways to address the issue of "widening the nets."

The analysis of the flow of youths through the justice systems of the National Evaluation produced mixed, inconclusive findings. Althugh the data were generally insufficient to make definitive judgments, on three of the sites the probability of referral to increased penetration, at the point of diversion, appears to have been reduced as a result of the diversion projects. The available evidence at a fourth site was negative, and the remaining sites were characterized by so much missing and ambiguous data that even speculation was prevented.

Some evidence emerged indicating that when diversion takes place early in the justice process the probability of remaining in the system, once so referred, increases. It was also clear that changes in policies, historical events, or justice procedures so impact justice record systems as to seriously jeopardize their use as a source for assessing system impact.

THE COST OF DIVERSION

Over the past several decades, there has been a marked increase in the use of cost studies in the evaluation of social programs. The interest in cost analysis has developed in association with a more general concern to specify the worth of social programs vis-a-vis their own goals and contributions to society. Cost studies are attractive as they provide a method for organizing and comparing programs; descriptions are based on a dollar-defined value system and offer a presumably objective way of measuring and comparing efficiency. The procedures used in such studies, however, often require subjective judgments and speculations about costs. As such, the results can vary substantially in terms of the reasonableness of estimations and lack of objectivity. While the state-of-the-art of cost analysis does appear to be improving, no such cost study should be the sole basis of decisions about social programs.

The primary focus of the cost analysis of the National Evaluation of Diversion Projects was to assess and compare the costs of the projects, to estimate juvenile justice system costs for selected areas, and to offer limited comparisons of diversion versus traditional processing through the juvenile justice system.

Projects expenditures were calculated for the first 18 months for which clients were received by the projects for services. Expenditures ranged from $170,000 to $633,000 across the 11 projects of the evaluation. The range of total number of referrals to the project for this period was also extreme, with a low of 137 to a high of 791.

Roughly three-fourths of those referred were enrolled for services, and the length of time for which services were rendered across all projects averaged approximately 5 months. The average cost per referral (total expenditures divided by the number of referrals received) for the first 18 months of operation averaged $1,302 and ranged from a low of $298 to a high of $3,060. The cost associated with actual enrollment (total expenditures divided by the number of referrals enrolled for services) increased to $1,722 and ranged from a low of $429 to a high of $4,136.

On the basis of a set of highly qualified cost calculations for the juvenile courts of three of the impact sites, the average cost per court client was determined to be $463, ranging from a low of $298 to a high of $652. Tentative comparisons of court costs with those of the diversion projects on these three sites indicated that, on one site, the per referral costs for the project were higher than those for the court; on another, the costs were identical; and on the third, the costs for the justice system were greater than those for the diversion projects.

It was difficult to draw hard, fast conclusions on the basis of comparing the cost findings of the projects of the National Evaluation with each other, with those of the court, or with those of other studies. Direct comparisons were troublesome, as missions and operations differed, methodologies varied, hidden costs were differentially identifiable and obtainable, and the scope, structure and conduct of the program were vastly divergent. Several things were clear, however: (1) The differences between sites were startling, irrespective of the unit of comparison. (2) The relationship between costs and number of referrals was weak. (3) While several of the projects of the National Evaluation fell within the cost range of the few outside cost studies reviewed, more than half were well above the average costs reported in those studies. (4) Diversion with no services was clearly the least costly justice disposition alternative.

CONCLUSION

The National Evaluation gathered considerable evidence that the projects supported by OJJDP's Diversion Inititative succeeded at meeting many of the criteria of true diversion. Virtually all of the clients served were referred by justice agencies as a result of a delinquent offense. The programs were clearly distinct from the justice system in that justice personnel did not act as service providers. Of the four programs for which adequate data were available, there was evidence that three had reduced the penetration of youth through the justice system. (Several of the other projects probably were not successful in this respect.) Finally, findings based on the reports of clients and service providers showed that the programs were less coercive, less controlling, and more oriented to meeting clients' needs than comparable justice agencies. In all, these findings indicate that the programs as implemented were a good match to the original program guidelines.

On the other hand, the findings that come from this unique opportunity to test the effects of diversion programs on their clients were not favorable. A diversion disposition was no more successful in avoiding stigma, improving social adjustment, or reducing delinquent behavior than normal justice processing or outright release. Nor did diversion services appear to be of consequence. In these areas, the evaluation did not support the rationale behind diversion programs. Though these diversion programs might still have a place in the juvenile justice system, it would not appear to be because they represent a more effective way of dealing with troubled youth.

Finally, although the findings of the National Evaluation cannot be generalized to other specific diversion programs they cannot be ignored either. Because these findings were consistent across four replications of the same study at different sites, each of which was different in point of diversion, type of clients, seriousness of offenders, ethnic distributions, etc., they cannot be dismissed as idiosyncratic and thus unimportant. To the contrary, the programs and research designs were especially appropriate to testing the effects of the essential characteristic of diversion programs, their status as community-based alternatives to justice processing. Thus, the findings associated with this research have serious implications for the future of diversion programming.

*U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1982 O-361-233/1868